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SUBJECT: "AND THEY'RE OFF!" -- OUR OVERVIEW FOR THE ELECTION SEASON
KICKED OFF BY PRESIDENTIAL DECREE

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REF:

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (U) SUMMARY: President Kocharian's January 29 decree announcing the May 12 parliamentary election is the first step in the election process, and comes two days ahead of the 100-day advance notice prescribed by Armenian law. Following is an overview and projected timeline of key dates for the pre-election period, as well as our intended reporting plan. END SUMMARY

THE TIMELINE

12. (U) THE CLOCK STARTS: Armenia's revised Electoral Code requires the president to announce the election date not less than 100 days beforehand--or February 1 for a May 12 date. The announcement keeps to the schedule previously communicated to us informally by GOAM officials, which projected the presidential decree for July 31, with a formal invitation immediately thereafter to OSCE/ODIHR for an Election Observation Mission (EOM). In fact, the ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission team arrived in Yerevan this week to begin its work in determining the scope for an EOM.

13. (U) NOMINATIONS: The Electoral Code enshrines in law several additional procedures and dates. There are two categories of seats in the National Assembly, proportional representation (party list) and majoritarian (single candidate), seats, with different provisions for the two. For proportional representation (PR) seats, political parties and/or registered multi-party blocs must nominate their rank-ordered lists of candidates with the Central Election Commission (CEC) no earlier than 75 and no later than 70 days before the election, in other words, between February 26 and March 3. Paperwork filings for majoritarian seats are handled at the Territorial Election Commission (TEC) level, rather than centrally by the CEC in Yerevan. The 41 TECs correspond to the 41 districts represented by the majoritarian seats. Majoritarian candidates are nominated either by political parties, political blocs, or any group of 50 individuals, during the same nomination period (February 26-March 3). Nomination paperwork requires only submission of basic data (Name, address, DOB, occupation, passport number, and party affiliation, if applicable, and candidates' written statement of intent).

14. (U) REGISTRATION: The next required step is registration of the candidates. Candidates must submit a more detailed package of documents by March 28 (45 days prior). They must submit certificates that they have been both legal citizens and physically resident in Armenia for at least the previous five years. They must file a declaration of property and income. Finally, candidates

(majoritarian seats) or parties (PR seats) must pay a deposit. Majoritarian candidates pay AMD 100,000 each (roughly \$275), while parties or party blocs pay a single deposit of AMD 2,500,000 (nearly \$7,000) for their entire slate of candidates. The government then has until April 2 to complete the registration, having confirmed the candidates' qualifications. Election authorities discretion to disallow candidates appears limited to the narrow, technical qualifications of citizenship, residence, etc. There is an appeals procedure for candidates deemed unqualified. Winning candidates or political parties/blocs have their deposits returned to them after election day. Candidates or party lists who are disqualified by election authorities or who run and fail to win seats forfeit their deposit to the state treasury.

15. (SBU) CABINET AND STATE OFFICIALS TAKE LEAVE: The Constitution requires state employees, including cabinet ministers and other senior political officials, to take leave from their government positions if they run for parliamentary seats. This leave must take effect no later than the date of official candidate registration, (that is, by no later than April 2). (NOTE: The specific details of how this will play out in practice remain unclear. We checked informally with a deputy minister, who volunteered that he and his colleagues had recently debated the question amongst themselves, and it became clear that none of them really knew. END NOTE)

16. (U) END OF CAMPAIGN: All active political campaigning must cease two days before the election, or in this case on May 10.

REPORTING PLAN

17. (SBU) In addition to ongoing spot reports of news and analysis, we plan reporting in several key areas over the next 100 days. This timeline cable represents our first election season reporting. Upcoming reports include: a more complete analysis of the revised Electoral Code (February), political party primer/key political

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figures (February), status of election assistance and process reform efforts (February and ongoing), party lists and candidates overview (March), elections and the media (March), and in-country regional reporting (February, March, April).

GODFREY